IT Contribution in the Consolidation of Organizational Competences - A Case Study on a Hotel Group

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ABSTRACT

The information economy is based on the net appliance, which decreases the intermediary's participation in the activities of purchase and sale of products and services. The tourism sector has its activities based on information in which its products are considered low touch, where the purchaser acquires a service without a physical approaching with it. However, it can be noticed that there is still a trade off between embracing and wealth, but day-by-day it is reduced by the increasing use of Information Technology and communication through its information system. The advancement of IT allied to business' strategic can establish new models of business to observe in a more efficient way the sectors innovation that works intensively with information, contributing with the competence consolidation aiming the client and connected network attendance. This paper analyses, through a case study in a big Hotel network, some aspects that are related to IT's application for competitiveness increasing. Such aspects are related to the entrepreneur's strategic articulation as the general configuration of Front Office and Back Office, client's communication improvement, the use of web, client fidelity, disintermediation of activities and cultural activities adaptation on the services offering.

Keywords

Information technology, organizational competence and tourism sector.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The information economy establishes a transformation in the activities that are based on the economy scale for activities based on network economy, where the information is the primordial recourse and the Information Technology (IT) is presented through information systems. In the network's economy dynamism it can be highlighted the demand that provides a *vicious circle* in two different strategies (evolutionary and revolutionary), providing an imperfect and turbulent relation of dispute of markets and prices, for the web connected consumer may trade the products and services with different suppliers almost simultaneously.

The consumer reconfigures technological applications matching different IT's, giving, then, the ability of fast adapting the on-line offers to his own satisfaction. The deconstruction can be understood as the traditional business structures' reformulation, dividing information economy from industrial or objects economy. This way, it's given a decrease in the trade off between embracing and wealth, reducing costs and providing better services to society with good quality information.

The tourism is based on the information management with attraction and movement of people. This sector is one of the pioneers in the e-commerce activities and it depends on aspects that are related to the efficient application of the information and the technology supporting it. Hence, the information technology application firmly aids in the sector's competitiveness growth. For this article it will be the approached the hotel activities through a case study on a group which is reference in the national and international market, the Accor group. This study's objective is to identify elements that contribute to the increasing of the sector's competitiveness, through the consolidation of organizational competence having as reference the IT management, considering the new business and cultural aspects.

2.0 INFORMATION ECONOMY

In the information economy, the entrepreneur activity's logic is headed to a good quality information production that has a high fixed cost, but with a fast and cheap reproduction (marginal cost) (Shapiro and Varian, 2002). It's an industrial economy's paradigm that is changing into information economy with the growing application of information technology presented in information systems (Tapscott and Caston, 1993).

The companies with activities in services and mainly those which vital recourse is information (Cornella, 1997), in the case of tourist sector companies, have the information management as a fundamental element in the search of a competitive differential. In this context, the consumer by himself establishes the price of the products and services due to the increase of the demand by customization and not by cost calculation. While the industrial economy is moved by scale economy, the information economy is moved by the network economy, that sustains itself through a positive feedback. The manufacturing is contextured in a secondary role because what is important in this context is not what is manufactured, but the generated idea, the given value and how it's sold to the consumer who evaluate the products. The fabrication can be made by a third company through a great number of connected partners, which facilitates a mass customization (Davis, 1987).

For Castells (1999), a culture of real virtually built around the more and more interactive audiovisual universe, permeates the mental representation and communication in every place. The time and space, material basis in the human experience, were transformed as the flow space occupied empty places. The non-temporal time started substituting the chronological time in the taylorist industrial area.

The information economy establishes an information relation in every production material process of distribution, mainly reaching and in the ambit of the generated products circulation. The industrial evolution into informational has changed the technological ability of using the direct productive power for the superior capacity of processing symbols. In such network's economic dynamism it is highlighted the positive feedback concept (Shapiro and Varian, 2002), which is translated in demand growing and provides a vicious circle in two different strategies: one evolutionary and the other revolutionary.

The information dominates process and products and this, with the used mechanism for its generation and transmission, reforms the undertaking structures, as well as the improvement of the business itself, as it will be analyzed in the current article. Information is a decisive factor in the current organizations' competitive advantages, for this redefines the suppliers and clients network, the physical sequence of products elaboration, in short, the traditional and restricted services and goods production channels.

The information economy establishes an imperfect and turbulent market and products' prices dispute, because the client can change the supplier with simple and fast Web consulting movements (just a few 'clicks'). The separation between physical value chains allows each chain to develop in a very different way, that makes traditional management models more and more vulnerable due to undertaking operations based on information and knowledge.

3.0 WEALTH AND EMBRACING

According to Evans and Wurster (2000), the information economy provides a trade off between wealth (information quality) and embrace (number of people sharing the information), once this trade off generates asymmetry in information, which means difference in terms of knowledge among people or companies that affects their negotiation power.

The trade off between wealth and embracing is based on the existence of information channels as the physical infrastructure or behavioral patterns that sustain limited information movements. The end of the information asymmetry depends on the trade off elimination between wealth and embracing, which really occurs in business' network that change their operations' detailed information as in the tourist sector case (web information on flights, services, hotels, tours, etc…). It's the connectivity growth and the application of the patterns that create the differential because the owner network yield space to open network

providing the traditional business structure deconstruction and the end of the intermediation between clients and suppliers.

> "The deconstruction is the disintegration and the reformulation of the traditional business structures. It's the consequence of two strengths actions: information economy separation from objects information and the end (within the information economy) of the trade off between wealth and embracing. This enables the business' structures not be organized so perfectly among suppliers, organizations and faithful consumers." (Evans and Wurster, 2000, p. 46)

That's what happens to companies that sustain their activities more and more with the aid of electronic intermediaries as the intelligent agents that organize the information (Franklin and Graesser, 1996).

According to Turban et al. (2003), it's possible that the intelligent agents become one of the most important tools for information in the 21st century. They allow the increase of the embracing and wealth simultaneously, decreasing the information overload. They have as characteristic the access to information and browsing, support for decision and delegation of authority, the automatization of repetitive tasks, minimization of personal tasks, recuperation of information, electronic commerce aid, special activities modeling and explanation, combination, monitoring, suggestion management activities aid among others. The agents can also help on products and services purchase decisions, finding preferences for different clients' profile.

4.0 DESINTERMEDIATION

With the trade off decreasing between wealth and embracing the desintermediation will occur in a more effective way, reducing the products' final price and forcing intermediaries from many sectors to search for new professional performance. Evans and Wurster (2000) defend two ways of disintegration: the one that is moved by the actual wealth and embracing curve towards a bigger embracing and the one that dislocates the curve, according to the following figure.
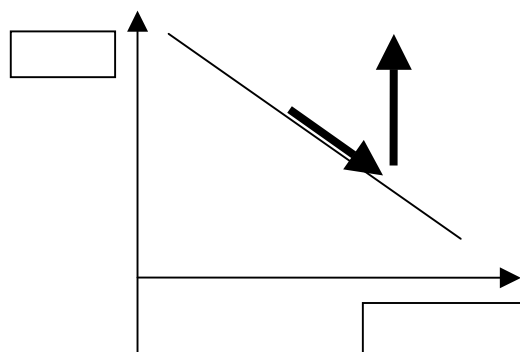

Figure 1: Trade off between wealth and embracing
Evans and Wurster adaptation (2000).

In the traditional form of desintermediation, the new competitor attacks the established intermediary offering more embracing and less wealth. It concentrates on clients of difficult embracing or clients that gives less importance to wealth that is offered by the traditional intermediary, providing this way cheaper products or services and redefining the market segmentation. The second and more radical way of desintermediation occurs when the technology dislocates the curve wealth/embracing (fig 1), allowing new competitors to offer a bigger embracing and more wealth simultaneously. It holds a bigger risk, but it offers the possibility of its own business transformation, besides the market re-segmentation, placing the company in a more competitive level.

The wealth/embracing curve dislocation is defended by bigger and bigger investments of virtual performance, where the electronic guides or agents have a fundamental configuration and re-configuration performance of each browser for a more analytic suppliers and services' information search. However, identification of actions related to the information management before this new dimension of wealth/embracing is treated in this article by the hotel sector application, where the client becomes more and more sophisticated when dealing with information (connectivity, portability, cultural adaptability, fidelity among other aspects).

Murphy et al. (In O'Connor, 1999) analyze the significant investment in the web aiming the hotel sector desintermediation through direct reservation from the clients themselves. However, most of the companies still recognize the importance of the travel agent and the tourism operator, and partially use this.

5.0 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) AND STRATEGIC INNOVATION

The information economy is an entrepreneur economy aiming to understand the network systematic, to dare and to sell through contents that aggregate value in the relation that is sustained by information technology, directly or indirectly with the client. It's in this context where we find the tourism sector, for it is a precursory area in the accomplishing of e-business due to flight tickets reservations activities (Proll and Retschitzegger, 2000).

The authors introduce three essential aspects for the IT application in tourism and for the efficient implementation of business strategic:
a) Access quality in all phases of business' negotiation and solidification: Tsalgatidou and Pitoura (2001) analyze the advances for mobile e-commerce or uniting features of enlargement of *Business to Consumer* (B2C) services.
b) Content quality as efficient service parameter due to the tourist information dynamism (Schertler, 1994).
c) Ability to customize the system, which presents a generic integration platform from different tourist information suppliers.

The new demand caused by the users who configure their own informational applications, whether via web or physically, provide the arise of more intelligent services. Today there is the m-business (Kalakota and Robinson, 2002) for being a new technologic way of service that evolving migrates from the connectivity and portability concepts: IT application through mainframes, evolving to desk top and today notebooks until it reaches the mobile phone or mobile service. These are services that change the consumer's culture and the bid of today's services, because the competitiveness will lie on the consumer's portability.

Albertin and Moura (2002) show innovations in payment electronic systems as *smart card* storing updating technology for products and services presented as an electronic money wallet; the *e-check* (electronic check creation) to be used for payments; and *e-cash*, that is related to electronic money to be used in electronic commerce operations. These technologies are examples of how the electronic commerce in Brazil can be facilitated. The authors evaluate the actual situation of the electronic commerce and Brazilian tendencies through analysis structure studies on Electronic Commerce (EC).

In an organizational context, there is a differentiated treatment on the information contents, mainly due to the use of multidimensional technologies of information management like *Business Intelligence* (BI) (Barbieri, 2001). With the *Data Warehouse* (DW) technology (Harrison, 1998) allied to *Business Intelligence* (BI) it's possible to find essential information stored in a data bank in order to better know the client or the process.
The *Data Mining* (DM) technology is a technique that can also efficiently collaborate in the search of connections that more transactional or informational management systems cannot identify. However, the intelligence is not in a data bank from which it can be captured, but in an organizational process. An implementation analysis on the information systems based on an interview of a manager in this area will confirm some care that must be taken into consideration:

> "*Business Intelligence* (BI) es una herramienta capaz de automatizar la inteligencia. Pero la inteligencia no es del BI y sí de los ejecutivos que trabajan con los factores macro y micro económicos y que impactaran en el negocio. Esta inteligencia está en la creatividad intelectual. El BI tiene que ser una expresión de la creatividad de cada organización. El diferencial del negocio es lo que se hace a través del BI y que genera de informaciones de valor" (Vanti, 2003, p. 72).

In the case of hotels, creating and innovating services that significantly amplify the choice of one or other hotel. The comfortableness of the housing is extremely important, however the allied services can provide a very big competitive differential with the bid of different high technology services based on information. The Web is the

more efficient way of producing and disseminating information with significant impact for the tourist sector

The web works as an information or content channel, as a communication channel socializing the relation between people and business as a channel of commercial or business transactions. The company organizes itself as a complete system of information generating knowledge. This company constantly creates itself.

According to Venkatraman (2000), it can be followed a business positioning strategy in the web through the way network can aggregate value to the new business' models, developing a more virtual strategy, establishing recourses of internal initiatives for digital, making it available a suitable operational infrastructure (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993) and aligning the digital development importance strategic level.

The information management in the tourism area rather than a competitive differential it's a necessity. The intensive use of information must be directed to the knowledge generation with the finality of innovation, with new ways of technological redirection. Bonabeau (2002) analyses the social interactions allied to simulator technologies so that new companies can meet and predict emergent phenomena (simple rules of individual behavior, small changes on the function of rules and the danger of using intuition when predicting various behaviors.)

The tourist sector nature is changing fast, for the profit margin are getting smaller and smaller allied to a more and more international competition. The tourist aims to escape from the package tour offered by the operators, making their trips more and more independent (Poon, 1994). This consequently increases the amount of tourist information, mainly available in the web. So, the entrepreneur strategy will be more and more related to the availability and to the fast access of this information by the final consumer. The information technology enhances a lot the trip advising when it guaranties the tourists necessity and suitable information to the asked demand.

O'Connor (1999) emphasizes that the hotel enterprises recognize that the storage and management of information about clients has a very important value in the increase of competitiveness. Nowadays it is stored a very significant quantity, or all of it, of information related to the clients' preferences, lodging description, destinies, geographical distribution, demographic details and information for potential guests, collected through telephonic search or shared with other hotel groups. This aids the increase of the efficiency and a better direction for marketing campaigns.

6.0 THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION AND THE COMPETENCE MATTER

With regard to dynamism, service sector's characteristic, mainly on the tourist sector, the IT has awaken as a strategic option that consolidates the organizational strategies through management practices that are more suitable and promoting the information management. This way, the competence matter is a fundamental discussion to guaranty the survival and support of the competitive strategies.

The strategic formulation process can be analyzed under two different perspectives: the competitive strategy and the company's recourses. Under the competitive strategy, the emphasis is regarded to the understanding of the relation company/industry, being its dealer known as Porter (1989). The basic analysis level is the industry and the strategy is established having as source information related to the characteristics, market's dynamic and tendencies (out-side-in). According to Oliveira (2001, p.44),

> "a competitive advantage is created once unique opportunities are identified in terms of market-products. From this point, it's established the integration necessities among organizational functions and, at the same time, the criteria of prioritization of the critical functions for the company's success".

The approach of the company's recourses, by itself, emphasizes the organizational and human recourses portfolio. In this sense, what a company can do to create a competitive advantage is not only an approach function in the environment, but also of the recourses it can mobilize and organize (Inside-out).

Both approaches, despite of showing different departure points to the organizational analysis, are not excluding. The organization, under the systemic focus, analyses the market and its strategic positioning and, at the same time, beholds the intern recourses that are highlighted in relation to this panorama, without losing sight of the necessary recourses to be developed. Such a dynamic confers the organization a more interesting and embracing mobility than the simple choice for the out-side-in or inside-out approach, mainly with application on tourism, which characterizes itself by significantly trans-disciplinary activities.

For this article, the emphasis is on the second approach having in mind the focus in strategies unfolding on the organizational strategies on management practices, or more specifically, the analysis of organizational competence to operational competence or technological meeting the information technology thematic, which supports a many operational initiatives related to the tourism sector.
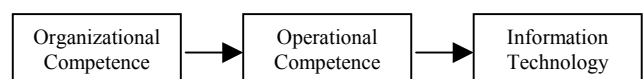
Organizational Competence	→	Operational Competence	→	Information Technology

Figure 2: Organizational competence to information technology

The term "competence" has simultaneously been one of the most used and one of the most controverts terms in the contemporary administration slang. Different concepts and different dimensions mark its appropriation whether in the

business environment or academic. The most spread concept in the past few years, regarding competence is the one developed by Hamel and Prahalad (1995, p. 81), that is, "The ability of building with lower cost and faster than the competitors, the core competence that will bring unexpected products", as well as, "a set of abilities and technologies that result in a fundamental differential for the company's competitiveness." (Ruas, 2000). Under this view, the recourses theory was spread with a "new clothing", the one from the core competence, as referred by Wernerfelt (1994, p. 171) to the developed work by Hamel and Prahalad (1995), "singularly responsible for the diffusion of the view that is based on the practical recourses."

Leonard-Barton (1992, p.111) informs that many authors have been dominating the core competence in a differentiated way like distinctive competence (Snow and Hrebiniak, 1980; Hitt and Ireland, 1985), specific-firms competence (Pavitt, 1991), recourses development (Hofer and Schendel, 1978) invisible actives (Itami and Roehl, 1987), capacitating (Javidan, 1998; Petts, 1997; Stalk et al., 1992), giving origin to what Stalk et al (1992) denominates capacitating based competition.

Retaking the strategic logic, there are three ways of competition according to Fleury and Fleury (2000):
a) Operational excellency;
b) Products innovation;
c) Services orientation.

It is worth noting that this simplistic classification represents just one of the ways to see the organization under the strategic point of view, but it meets our objective.
Within the technical competence, it can be analyzed the following elements:
a) Operation competence;
b) Marketing competence;
c) Finance competence.

This way, more specifically, this article concentrates on the services orientation matter, highlighting the technical competence as orientation, displayed through competence in operations that, in this case, are relatives to operations related to the information management. So, the information, in this context, has a strategic and articulator character. The information technology is a very important part in core competence.

7.0 INVESTIGATION AND APPLICATION TECHNIQUES ON TOURISMO SECTOR

The tourism study follows a multidisciplinary approach that most of the times involves areas like administration, psychology, economy, geography, technology, among others. The tourism doesn't configure as an independent area; it needs this interaction, this dynamism. The aim in this paper follows a qualitative methodology strategy and exploratory that has been developed through deep interview with a businessman from group Accor, which is a reference in the national and international Hotel activity.

The interview was made by phone and took place in the "Radio of Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS)" studio, in order to certify clearness in the recording. Once registered in magnetic way, the interview was transcribed and the main information is incorporated in this text.

Yet, as data source, it has been used secondary data as the hotel's Web Page and bibliography revision. The presented interview was accomplished in 04/16/2003 with the Information Technology Director from Accor group, in order to, specifically, analyze the subject in question.

8.0 CASE STUDY – ACCOR GROUP

According to O'Connor (1999), the Accor group started its activities in 1967 with a single hotel in the north of France until it becomes one of the biggest hotel, hostelry, restaurants and trip companies in the world. The Accor group allies its activities with the undertaker development, gathering in Brazil 26 brands in the food and restaurants, hotels and trips, productivity and marketing segment. Accor Hotels operates 112 units among hotels and flats with the brand Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure, Ibis, Formule 1 and Parthenon, resulting in more than 12,700 apartments and with an operation prevision for 2005 of 27,000 apartments, consolidating its leadership in Brazil and Latin America (www.accor.com.br).

The Accor group has been characterized for its innovation on its undertaking also using information technology in the direct relation with the client, as in the case of hotel modality with auto-attending Etap and Formule 1, which service has provided a meaningful increase.

For the Accor group, the most powerful force in the organization is the belief on the partnership with the people who make part of the employee section in the company. The result from this is the conquer of one of the best companies to work in, identified by the Exame magazine since 1997. The employee chooses what he desires to learn (www.accor.com.br).

The electronic information management in the Accor hotels occurs through a central reservation department that embodies a worldwide network of telemarketing with a system that provides information and reserves solicitations.

The group has adopted information technology as one of its main priorities and it's been developing an entire investment program aiming to enhance its services, to increase the efficiency and to control the costs through the improvement and redefinition of the hotel reservation and management tools, as business' modality categories where the traveler makes good use of the service as a necessary accessory to the need of being in a hotel in a determined moment. (O'Connor, 1999). The problem matter has been established in the following way: how can IT management collaborate in the increasing of the competitiveness in a hotel considering the need of the core competence consolidation?

For this, the main competence have been identified in the Group and the questions related to the intern organizational characteristics have been defined, to the general configuration of Front Office and Back Office, communication improvement with clients, the use of web, clients fidelity, desintermediation of activities and cultural adaptation of services rendering.

8.1 Strategic Management and the Information Technology (IT) Contribution

The Accor group characterizes for having an audacious and pioneer strategy directed to the client attending and to commerce network. Thus, the core competence of the group is related to the client and partners relationship matter.

In this context, the communication matter is very important, for it supports this kind of relationship. The information is treated as strategy, enhancing the "stage" or "backstage" operations.

The matter can be approached through Information technology in Front Office and Back Office. The Front Office pattern from Accor group has the objective of attending the mobility and reduction of learning and training costs through a system called Fidelio allied to a PVD applicative for alimentation area. In this informational structure it is also available a system for hotel reception.

The group adopts system Fidelio, from Michael Fidelio, which does the previous system's rollout in order to standardize in the network with the overseas companies, an unique application with the intention of reducing cost. The group already has 50% of the hotels that migrated to this Front Office system, this way it will be possible a national and international mobility of united collaboration with the effective participation of the employees that are considered collaborators. So, the Front Office is being standardized to obtain more system adherence.

Regarding to Back Office, it's been searching a decentralized focus, this is, each hotel configures its own called CM, from CM solutions, which will provide a stronger communication, a better-structured e-mail that not only transfer information, but constantly generate knowledge and innovation. The Front Office and Back Office are integrated to the reception, client attending, and, related to the shop necessities, storage control, bills to receive, bills to pay and hotel accountancy activities. There are two platforms that communicate and make it possible an integrated ambient.

Related here too is the contracted system that beholds the process of corrective maintenance, preventive maintenance and virus verification. These activities are contracted to cut expenses through partnership with first line suppliers. This way, it can be reached a lower maintenance cost. For this, the group has gotten the contract of nationally known company which makes it possible the international adherence of the

systems functioning, always respecting the regional customization.

8.2 Communication and Differentiation of Rendered Services

The Accor Group presents an intensive work regarding communication, whether internal or external ambient, since reservation until corporate e-mail use, passing by customization strategies.

Among the shown tools, we highlight that e-mail sending is almost exclusively corporate. This applies to the reservation area that is centered in the hotel. So, when a client wishes to accomplish an event, he informs this event characteristic, the dates, details related to involved services like coffee break. From this point a combined or hybrid virtual negotiation starts, where the quantity and kinds of coffee, for example, are arranged. Then occurs a commented negotiation via e-mail where it's named Critical Mission, because during the negotiation, the contractor can be accomplishing the same with the competitor next door.

Regarding hotel communication with the administration or centered services, a file exchange and basically a less structured communication is available, as a given characteristic due to the fact that the same attend clients' specific necessities, where in most of services are not standardized. So, the most common and efficient way of accomplishing this kind of activity is the use of e-mail, because it's possible to obtain a Critical Mission with it, mainly in a high level hotel, like Sofitel.

The final client can also be attended through reservation confirmation, or with the fidelity card Compliment, that is only emitted to clients that authorize the receiving of bids (avoiding the less possibility of being considered *Spam*). Accor group has a strong characteristic on information management, and here we can highlight the program Compliment (daily rates are score dots that become free lodging in Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure, Ibis and Parthenon hotels) that manages to control the use and the behavior of the clients through the exclusive use of information: use, where the client comes from, what the client's preferences are, what this client wants to do.

Then, for a client who is considered an assiduous client, this program is available in the net, which gives a series of information about the program and even an available simulator in www.compliments.com.br for verification of dailies with the gained dots. Compliment program is more and more integrated to the client through the IT. We also point out the gastronomic card, from the units considered up scale that gives fidelity to the client through the brand that is associated to the internationally known French cuisine.

Within the Compliment process, it's already started the Business Intelligence (BI) process, which is still empiric, but still studies the processes to implant statistic controls with neural nets that enable to evaluate the Behavior Score, which

is the client's use. Instead of accomplishing *Broadcast* campaign investments it's accomplished the *narrowcast,* which give a bigger feedback rather than the proposed service sale and lodging to the clients. Actually, the client's profile is identified, considering its application and in these patterns it can be offered the services customization.

8.3 Web Use and Strategic Activity

The group worldwide WebPages is located in France, Paris, but the regional promotions and each region details are accomplished by each branch. This is another important communication instrument that becomes more and more efficient day by day, linking it to a centered and worldwide process of reservation system, connected to the main Global Distribution Systems (GDS), that were the originally developed systems by air companies, like Amadeus, Sabre and others. They are systems that have been automatically integrated to our reserve distribution process, the *Travel Accor Reservation System* (TARS), introduced since last December to serve Brazil (second biggest Accor reservation site in the world), which is connected to the hotels.

The reservation system is centered and hosted in France through GDS gives a worldwide visibility of all management to the group information, regarding reservations and distribution. For the technologic infrastructure support in the most economic hotels, it's been working with ADSL, which is a cheaper connection, that will provide through MPLS the data traffic and voice for a more integrated connectivity.

Actually 35% of the hotels already have broadband internet. The broadband internet network is physically separate from the hotel intern network. These are cables apart so that the client doesn't share or compete the same net use, so, it can be given the lodger total priority. Another project in partnership with "OI" (Rio de Janeiro) will provide the Wireless Fidelity (Wi-Fi) installation that will firstly contemplate the circulation areas in the hotels. This project assures the client, since the moment he access the hotel environment, the interception of an environment of wireless communication, where he can authorize the use expenses with the internet directly in his credicard or from his lodging.

So, related to the infrastructure, the group is getting more and more integrated generating the same reports, the same kind of encashment. The matter of the client comfort and adaptation to the environment are other requisites the group is willing to attend. It will depend a lot of the localization and category of each hotel. The actual function is defining patterns, structuring main communication activities and connectivity, defining *software* and *hardware*. Compaq also acts on the aid of all this integration.

8.4 IT Collaboration with Clients Fidelity

In the offered differentiation through IT innovation, the idea of client comfort prevails. For example, the Sofitel unit will start working at the end of the year, in Salvador, precisely in Pelourinho. It will be installed a mobile station that is turned into cellular phone. So, when the guest is in the hotel he holds a mobile station line from the hotel, but once he leaves, the station becomes a mobile phone, which allows to provide mobility and comfort for the movement outside, mainly when the client is a foreigner and doesn't have this kind of equipment available.

It's also working in a universal remote control for the hotel environment, which demands a reconfiguration in the technological infrastructure. These patterns are being developed with Siemens to define some environment patterns. Siemens, with Accor, is captivating information to define what it has to be available in the hotel to enhance the environment for the client, since the client perspective to his consequently fidelity.

These are just some of the examples of how IT can contribute to offer better comfortableness and security to the guests, guarantying the attending differentiation.

8.5 IT in the Business Disintermediation

As highlighted before, the business desintermediation is a group strategic option, with the objective the attending agility. This is possible, through wide activities of *Business to Business* (B2B) as corporate relation of desintermediation. In an international level, it is occurring a very big desintermediation to the B2B management. This way, it can be accomplished more direct operations between the purchaser and the seller, considering that the agencies earn due to determined range of selling movement.

In the USA, the use of Web has been also increasing significantly by the employees who travel periodically, desintermediating this way the agency in the process of reservation or utilization of trips by the company. Maybe in Brazil this process can be led in a bigger time rather than the world tendency, however, the agency activity is getting different, smaller, it can even disappear as time goes by, and it's noticed that some agencies don't charge the hotel the tax they sold anymore. It's noticed with this that it will occur a light change in their working format, all of it due to the efficient information management.

What happens is corporately treating first the companies, because the group makes it available a package that aims to reach a certain amount of *room night,* where the price becomes differentiated for Accor Group. For this reason the group, through its hotels, uses B2B to deal with corporative clients, as some university or companies in general, avoiding dealing directly with the final client. With the final client, the strategy is treating him the best way is possible, so that he can be a reference or has a good reference and his company will not change the supplier. This is the worry in well attending the guests.

8.6 Information Technology in the Brazilian Culture Adaptation

A lot of Brazilian businessmen work in small business, like merchants, and in this dimension units are also available for those who travel to São Paulo to resolve some business or for some training. Most of times this kind of client that involves self-employees, don't need a telephone set in the housing, he wishes to have an infrastructure where everything can be paid previously, he wants to make good use of a safe place to sleep, and also wants a honest price, that is suitable to his profile.

For this kind of client the group counts on Hotel Formula 1, in that is facing a great success in Europe and in Brazil it has already been having an occupation of around 90%. Formula 1 has the characteristic of offering IT with auto-attending and for this reason, the low cost as well. The operations can be accomplished directly by the client in the auto-attending.

In Brazil, the Formula1 flag has got a cultural adaptation, with the hybrid configuration Etap, with intern bathroom. The automatic auto-attending will be gradually tested and installed in this facility in São Paulo. This is the consideration IT must provide for its adaptation to each different country's culture, in this case Brazil.

The group visualize IT in a way it perceive the small Brazilian businessmen evolution and accomplish adaptations so that Accor can offer each day suitable products and prices to this kind of entrepreneur or self-employee who's looking for the hotel.

IT has always to be allied to the excellency pattern that is offered by the Accor group and even altering it to its improvement. This is a very strong commitment with quality that IT must contemplate whatever it takes and whatever the market offers, amplifying, this way, the intensive use of information.

9.0 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It's noticed that the information economy has changed the business activities, reducing the trade off between embrace and wealth. In sectors like the tourist sector where information is worked intensively, this reformulation is better identified and provides the reducing of travel agencies performance between the purchaser and the service seller. IT supports this desintermediation and it's the one that gives the tourist client or business traveler the effective incorporation of additional services as in the case of Wi-Fi in the Accor Hotels environment.

It's the creative destruction process that makes society show, each day more, undertaking, innovator proposals, which more appropriately understand the network systematic, betting with more daringness in contents and technologies that bring up more value to products and services, these firmly supported by information technology when presenting different systems of information, guarantying a competitive and bearable advantage and the consolidation of lasting competence.

For this paper, it was analyzed the Accor Group case, that holds a strong partnership with its employees, constantly invests in the technology updating making the systems more adherent and giving, with this, better services to its clients. In parallel, it presents innovations in the information technology (IT), which attend to the more varied client profiles (customization).

The main practices that are related to the information technology in the hotel group, and that offer support to the essential client attending competence and partnership for regional performance are: Front Office and Back Office integration in order to provide adherence to the systems, communication via e-mal, which is considered Mission Critical, identification of clients profiles with Business Intelligence technology allied to neural networks, the business desintermediation with a very high investment in B2B and the adaptation of all operational technology of auto-attending to the Brazilian demanding culture, in many cases, economic hotels.

Once having these elements articulation, it can be said the Accor group presents a competitive bearable differential that is difficult to imitate. It's because the information technology isn't seen as a simple tool, but as an important strategic element that articulates the core competence in the organizational practice guarantying a quality pattern in the attending and a strong relationship network (partnership).

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